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'Some NATO allies want longer war for weaker Russia': FM Çavuşoğlu

BY DAILY SABAH | ISTANBUL | APR 21, 2022 - 11:15 AM GMT+3 |

This aerial view shows a destroyed residential area in the village of Moshchun, northwest of Kyiv, on April 20, 2022. (AFP)

Some NATO member states want the war in Ukraine to continue in order to weaken Russia, Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu said Wednesday.

In a televised interview with private news broadcaster CNN Türk, Çavuşoğlu said Turkey did not think that the Russia-Ukraine war would continue much longer following the peace talks in Istanbul.

"But following the NATO foreign ministers' meeting, I had the impression that ... there are those within the NATO member states that want the war to continue," he said.

"They want Russia to become weaker," Çavuşoğlu said, without directly naming any countries, as talks between Ukrainians and Russians appear to have stalled after the last face-to-face meeting in Istanbul last month. The talks were due to continue online.

Turkey is one of the most active countries working to ensure a permanent cease-fire between Ukraine and Russia. Its delicately

balanced act of assuming a role as a mediator by keeping communication channels with both warring sides open provides a glimmer of hope in diplomatic efforts to find a solution and achieve peace in the Ukraine crisis. With its unique position of having friendly relations with both Russia and Ukraine, Turkey has won widespread praise for its push to end the war.

Since the beginning of the conflict, **Ankara has offered to mediate between the two sides and host peace talks**, underlining its support for Ukraine's territorial integrity and sovereignty. While Ankara has opposed international sanctions designed to isolate Moscow, it also closed its straits to prevent some Russian vessels from crossing through them.

In a breakthrough, Russian and Ukrainian delegations met for **peace talks in Istanbul** on March 29 as the war entered its second month with casualties piling up on both sides.

During the talks, Ukrainian officials signaled readiness to negotiate a "neutral status," a key Russian demand, but demanded security guarantees for their country. Ukraine wants to see countries, including Turkey, as guarantors in a deal with Russia, a Ukrainian negotiator said after the talks. Russia, meanwhile, pledged to significantly decrease its military activities focusing on the Ukrainian cities of Kyiv and Chernihiv to build trust for future negotiations.

Turkey also hosted the foreign ministers of Russia and Ukraine in Antalya last month. Foreign Ministers Sergey Lavrov of Russia and Dmytro Kuleba of Ukraine met in the Turkish resort town of Antalya for talks, which Foreign Minister Çavuşoğlu also attended. The talks were largely inconclusive, but Ankara views the fact that the talks took place at all as a success. Ankara has offered to host future peace talks.

On the possibility of a meeting between Russian and Ukrainian leaders in Turkey, Çavuşoğlu said President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan is in constant contact with both Vladimir Putin and Volodymyr Zelenskyy.

"President Erdoğan will speak to the leaders again in the coming days. I spoke with Lavrov today and with Kuleba yesterday," Çavuşoğlu added.

A Putin-Zelenskyy meeting in Turkey is still on the table, he said: "In principle, they both say positive things about getting together when the conditions are suitable."

Pledging continued Turkish efforts for peace in Ukraine, President Erdoğan on Monday underlined the need for a cease-fire that will pave the way for lasting peace to end the eight-week-old war.

Erdoğan has reiterated his offer to host Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and Russian President Vladimir Putin for talks to secure peace between the two countries on several occasions. Erdoğan voiced hope that a possible summit between the two leaders in Istanbul could bring an end to the war.

Lavrov told Çavuşoğlu in a phone call on Wednesday that the outcome of talks with Ukraine completely depended on Kyiv's readiness to take into account Russia's demands.

The Russian Foreign Ministry also said Lavrov and Çavuşoğlu discussed the situation in Ukraine's port of Mariupol and possible measures aimed at providing safety to civilians, including from foreign countries.

Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov said on Wednesday that Ukrainians were "withdrawing from what there have already been agreements on."

Turkey is among the international actors that have conducted plans for the evacuation of civilians from the besieged Ukrainian cities, particularly Mariupol.

The United Nations believes thousands of people have died in Mariupol after more than a month under Russian siege and relentless bombardment.

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